

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7068

INFO USINT CAIRO

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 KHARTOUM 1991

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINS SU

SULBC ANTI-NIMAIRI DEMONSTRATIONS

REF: STAHE 176733 NOTAL

1 BEGIN SUMMARY. NIMAIRI REGIME FACES SERIOUS THREAT. ALTHOUGH ARMY APPEARS LOYAL, PUBLIC IS APATHETIC (A DIS-ADVANTAGE) AND RAILWAY STRIKE CAN QUICKLY BECOME ECONOMICALLY CRIPPLING. DEGREE TO WHICH CURRENT THREAT BECOMES HISTORICALLY ONLY A WEAKENING OF THE REGIME OR SUCCEEDS IN OVERTURNING IT OR REVISING THE BASIC STRUCTURE DEPENDS UPON NIMAIRI'S ACTION DURING BRIEF GRACE PERIOD FOLLOWING HIS RETURN. END SUMMARY.

2. LEVEL OF THREAT. AS INDICATED REFTTEL, EMBASSY BELIEVES LEVEL OF THREAT TO NIMAIRI REGIME DEPENDS ON ELEMENTS OF ARMY LOYALTY, DEGREE TO WHICH GENERAL STRIKE EFFECTIVELY GAINS MOMENTUM AND PUBLIC ATTITUDE. OUR ASSESSMENT

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THESE FACTORS AND POSSIBLE FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IS AS

FOLLOWS:

A. LOYALTY OF ARMY. THE ARMY IS PROBABLY MORE UNIFIED IN SUDANESE NATIONALIST SPIRIT THAN EVER IN ITS HISTORY FOLLOWING 1969-1971 PURGES OF ITS SENIOR PRO-EGYPTIAN AND PRO-COMMUNIST OFFICER STRENGTH. THE GENERALS ARE YOUNG AND NIMAIRI'S MEN. NIMAIRI'S PROMINENCE TODAY IS THE RESULT OF HIS EXPERTISE AS A MILITARY PLOTTER AND IT IS UNLIKELY ANY ORGANIZED ARMY PLOT SEEKING HIS OVERTHROW HAS BEEN UNDERWAY. PRIOR TO THE CURRENT DISTURBANCES, THERE HAD BEEN REPORTS OF DISCONTENT WITHIN THE ARMY ON THE GROUND THAT NIMAIRI HAD MOVED TOO FAR TOWARD CIVILIAN RULE WITH AN ATTENDANT COMPROMISE OF ARMY GOALS. THESE CONCERNS MAY WELL HAVE BEEN BEHIND THE RECENT APPOINTMENT OF THREE EX-GENERALS AS PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS (CENTERS OF EFFECTIVE POLITICAL POWER). POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERNAL ARMY DISSENSION HAVE INCREASED DURING PAST WEEK WITH WHAT IS DISTASTEFUL ARMY ROLE IN CONFRONTING CITIZENS, APPARENT BYPASSING OF ITS COMMAND STRUCTURE BY SSU DEPSEC GEN (AND ARMY MAJOR) ABU GASSIM, AND GOS DISCRIMINATION-- THERE APPEARS TO BE RELIANCE ON USING SOUTHERN TROOPS AT KEY POINTS SUCH AS BRIDGES AND RADIO STATION. IT IS ALSO WELL TO RECALL THAT THE SUDANESE ARMY-- ALTHOUGH A PROFESSIONAL FORCE--IS ABOVE ALL A CITIZEN ARMY. IN NORMAL TIMES, IT GOES HOME IN THE AFTERNOON AND REMAINS ENTWINED IN THE WEB OF SUDANESE TRIBAL-RELIGIOUS-FAMILIAL RELATIONS. THE TROOPS ARE THUS SUBJECT TO NON-MILITARY INFLUENCES. THE 1971 BREAKDOWN IN DISCIPLINE MUST ALSO STILL BE A DISTURBING MEMORY TO ARMY LEADERS. HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE ARMY IS LOYAL TO NIMAIRI UNLESS A WIDESPREAD BREAKDOWN IN CIVIL ORDER OCCURS AFTER HIS RETURN AND AN INABILITY OF THE GOS TO GOVERN BECOMES CLEAR. THUS, FOR PURPOSES OF THE CURRENT ASSESSMENT, WE BELIEVE ARMY IS A PRO-NIMAIRI FACTOR.

B. THE UNIONS AND THE GENERAL STRIKE. IN ESSENCE, THIS QUERY CAN BE NARROWED TO THE RAILWAY WORKERS UNION. AS NOTED KHARTOUM 1978, ANY SUDANESE GOVERNMENT IS VIRTUAL HOSTAGE TO THE RAILWAY. AN EFFECTIVE RAILWAY STRIKE

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HAS A NOTICABLE EFFECT ON THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF KHARTOUM AND OTHER URBAN CENTERS (INDEED, EVEN THE THREAT OF A STRIKE HAS A NEGATIVE IMPACT) AND THE SITUATION CAN BECOME ECONOMICALLY CRIPPLING IN A FEW WEEKS. EVEN IF STRIKE ONLY PARTLY EFFECTIVE (BUT RAILWAY UNION HAS HISTORY OF MAINTAINING SOLIDARITY), LAST FEW MONTHS HAVE SHOWN ABILITY OF EVEN MINORITY ELEMENT OF RAILWAY WORKERS TO UNDERMINE SUPPLY SYSTEM. THUS, IF RAILWAY UNION ABLE

MAINTAIN ITS STRIKE POSTURE (AND ITS ABILITY WILL BE AIDED BY DEGREE TO WHICH IT IS SUPPORTED BY STRIKE EFFORTS OTHER UNIONS), GOS WILL HAVE CHOICE OF EITHER TAKING OVER THE RAILROAD OR MAKING CONCESSIONS. GOS REPORTEDLY PREPARING OPTIMISTIC CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR OPERATING RAILROAD WITH ARMY ENGINEERS AND RAILWAY RETIREES. IF UNSUCCESSFUL, GOS MUST RESORT TO NEGOTIATION. RAILROAD STRIKE IS CURRENTLY A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE REGIME.

C. PUBLIC APATHY. APATHY SUDANESE PUBLIC IS BASED ON UNWILLINGNESS TO TAKE RISK OF TOPPLING PRESENT GOVERNMENT WITHOUT KNOWING WHETHER THE ALTERNATIVE MIGHT BE WORSE. MOREOVER, INFLATION AND SUPPLY PROBLEMS, ALTHOUGH MAJOR PUBLIC CONCERN, HAVE NOT YET CREATED ACUTE SENSE OF PUBLIC DESPERATION. ALSO IN BACKGROUND IS EXPECTATION THAT ANY CHANGE MIGHT REOPEN SOUTHERN CONFLICT. WITHIN SHORT TIME SPAN OF NINE YEARS, SUDANESE HAVE EXPERIENCED GOVERNMENTS OF POLICIES DIRECTED BY THE MILITARY, POLITICAL PARTIES, REVOLUTIONARY COMMAND COUNCIL, DE FACTO COMMUNISTS AND THE CURRENT MIXTURE OF SIMPLISTIC IDEOLOGY AND RATIONAL ECONOMIC PRACTICE. PUBLIC IS NOT EAGER TO RELIVE ANY OF THEM AGAIN. FOR THE OPPOSITIONISTS, HOWEVER, PUBLIC APATHY IS AN ACCEPTABLE SECOND-BEST AS ONLY STRONG PUBLIC PRO-NIMAIRI SUPPORT COULD DETER RAILWAY STRIKE OR PREVENT THE THOUSANDS OF SMALL ACTIONS BY WHICH INDIVIDUALS HEDGE THEIR PERSONAL BETS AND ERODE THE AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT AS WHOLE (AS RECOGNIZED BY VP BAGHIR--KHARTOUM 1978). AS THE SUPPLY CRUNCH BEGINS TO BE FELT, PUBLIC MAY SHIFT TO FAVORING OPPOSITIONISTS IF IT APPEARS GOS POWERLESS. ANY ANTI-UNION SHIFT IS UNLIKELY OCCUR AS LONG AS GRIEVANCES EXIST WHICH PUBLIC RECOGNIZES AS VALID. PUBLIC MOOD AT PRESENT IS MODERATE THREAT. ITS FUTURE TREND CANNOT BE
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ESTIMATED UNTIL STRIKE EFFECT IS KNOWN AND--A KEY ASPECT--NIMAIRI'S ACTIONS AFTER HIS RETURN.

3. NIMAIRI RETURN. ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE THAT SOME GOS EXCESSES WHICH HAVE WORSENERD SITUATION WOULD NOT HAVE OCCURRED HAD NIMAIRI BEEN PRESENT, HIS ABSENCE PROVIDES HIM WITH CLEAR OPPORTUNITY DEFUSE SITUATION AFTER HIS RETURN BY DISAVOWING ACTS (SUCH AS ABU GASSIM'S GREEN SHIRT GANGS) CARRIED OUT IN SSU NAME. AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ACKING OF SSU OFFICIALS ABU GASSIM (AND, PERHAPS, MAHDI MUSTAFA AND JAAFAR ALI BAKHEIT), THE OPENING OF THE ELEMENTARY/SECONDARY SCHOOL SYSTEM AND A DEMONSTRABLE GOS COMMITMENT TO LEGAL PROCESSES INCLUDING RELEASE OF THE RAILWAY FRITTS

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UNION LABORRS WOULD MARKEDLY EASE THE CURRENT SITUATION.
THE PUBLIC IEXAPONDEGEZG WHAT NIMAIRI'S ACTIONS WILL BE
AND WE NOTE THAT PETITIONERS--IN CONTRAST TO STUDENTS--
HAVE NOT ATTACKED EXISTENCE OF REGIME OR
NIMAIRI PERSONALLY BUT CONCERNTRATED ON
GRIEVANCES NIMAIRI WOULD CERTAINLY FIND COMPROMISE
ACTIONS UNPALATABLE FOR PERSONAL, POLICY AND EGO REASONS.
HOWEVER, THE HISTORY OF HIS FOUR YEARS IN POWER IS ONE
OF RAPID POLICY SHIFTS WHEN CONVINCED OF A CRITICAL
SITUATION. WE BELIEVE HIS INSTINCT WILL BE TO HOLD
DOGGEDLY FIRM BOTH AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE (SSU AND
ITS OFFICIALS ARE HIS CREATIONS) AND IN RECOGNITION THAT
ONCE THE SACROSCANT SSU AND MAY REVOLUTION BALL
SBEGINS TO UNRAVEL, HE WILL INEVITABLY FACE RENEWED
POLITICAL CHALLENGES. IN OUR VIEW, A DIRECT ASSAULT
ON THE RAILWAY UNION WOULD FAIL. THUS, THE QUALITY OF
THE ADVICE HE RECEIVES WILL BE IMPORTANT.

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4. OVERALL ASSESSMENT EMB BELIEVE THERE IS
NO QUESTION AT THIS POINT THAT NIMAIRI REGIME
FACES SERIOUS THREAT. WHETHER THE THREAT RECENTLY
HISTORICALLY ONLY TO A WEAKENING OF REGIME OR SUCCEEDS IN
OVERTURNING IT OR REVISING ITS BASIC STRUCTURE DEPENDS
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